

LYNCHBURG CITY COUNCIL

Agenda Item Summary

MEETING DATE: **January 27, 2004 Work Session**

AGENDA ITEM NO.: 2

CONSENT:

REGULAR: **X**

CLOSED SESSION:

(Confidential)

ACTION: **X**

INFORMATION:

ITEM TITLE: **National Citizen Survey**

RECOMMENDATION: Amend the budget and appropriate \$11,350 from the General Fund Reserve for Contingencies to conduct The National Citizen Survey (NCS).

SUMMARY: As the City begins to embark upon the implementation of the "Results-Oriented Government" philosophy and performance measurement, it is important to establish a baseline regarding resident attitude about the quality of life and quality of service delivery in the City of Lynchburg. A citizen survey is a tool which the City can use to measure service performance, assess community needs, and make long-range, short-range and strategic plans. More importantly, given the current budget challenges, it is important to understand citizen perspectives regarding City services. The National Citizen Survey includes questions regarding the quality of life, local policies, quality of government services, and resident use of services in the City.

The NCS is intended to serve as a tool to help City Council determine spending priorities and strategies for the future given citizen feedback.

The NCS has been conducted in over 300 localities.

The National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) and the International City/County Management Association have partnered to provide survey services at a relatively low cost through standardization and automation of the survey process. The National Citizen Survey, administered by The National Research Center, Inc. is a service that conducts, analyzes, and reports results to the City from a customizable survey instrument. A copy of "Frequently Asked Questions" and "Questions Frequently Asked by Citizens" are attached for your information.

The cost of the basic survey is \$8,200. Additional fees include \$750 to cross-tabulate the data by demographics, \$1,200 to cross-tabulate geographically, and \$1,200 for one open-ended question for a total cost of \$11,350.

Staff recommends that the survey be conducted so that the results will be available for Council's annual retreat in August. A calendar outlining the elements involved in the survey is attached for your review.

Additional information is available at www.icma.org, Services for Local Government, The National Citizen Survey.

PRIOR ACTION(S): Preliminarily discussed at a Finance Committee Meeting during 2002.

BUDGET IMPACT: \$11,350 from the General Fund Reserve for Contingencies.

CONTACT(S): Bonnie Svrcek, Deputy City Manager 455.3990 Ext. 3987

ATTACHMENT(S): National Citizen Survey
Frequently Asked Questions
Timeline for The National Citizen Survey April 2004 Class

REVIEWED BY: lkp

National Citizen Survey

The first and last measure of good government is citizen satisfaction.

**The NCS™ Basic Service price
will be \$8,200 as of March 1, 2004.
Enroll now for the February survey class
to save money!**

What is The National Citizen Survey™?

Developed by ICMA and National Research Center, Inc., The National Citizen Survey (The NCS™) is a low-cost citizen survey service for local governments. Tested, flexible, affordable, and efficient, The NCS™ lets you survey citizen opinion for

- **Program Planning**
- **Budgeting**
- **Goal Setting**
- **Performance Measurement**

Staff can use the results of The NCS™ to improve service delivery. Elected officials can use the results to set spending priorities. The manager can use the results to measure progress and chart future steps.

You select from a set of standard questions to assess citizen opinion about basic services and community life. Additional customized questions let you tailor the survey to your unique needs.

The NCS™ Basic Service offered by ICMA and NRC includes:

- Customized survey form plus up to three optional questions
- Customized cover letter
- Three mailings to 1,200 randomly selected households: pre- survey postcard and two mailings of the survey instrument
- A margin of error (95 percent confidence interval) of no more than +/- 5 percentage points around any percent
- Data input and cleaning
- Data weighted to reflect population norms
- Three reports: executive summary, statistical analysis of survey results, optional comparison with national norms, all in electronic format
- Certificate of participation

- Technical assistance by phone and e-mail

Additional options:

- Larger mailings
- Customized norms by region, population, or other factors
- Spanish-language version of survey
- Addition of open-ended question
- Comparisons to results from surveys you've conducted in the past
- Demographic and geographic cross-tabulation
- Phone survey
- Presentation of results to elected officials

The National Citizen Survey™—Options and Prices Matrix

The price for The NCS™ Basic Service through February 2004 is \$7,500. Thereafter, the price for the Basic Service will be \$8,200. Additional options are available for the following additional fees (some of these fees will be changed on March 1, 2004):

Additional Option	Fee	Description
Demographic cross tabulation	\$750	Crosstabs will be provided in a separate report for 4 demographic questions by 10 question items. An NRC representative will help you select those items.
Geographic cross tabulation	\$1,200	Crosstabs will be provided in a separate report for evaluative questions (1-15) by each geographic area.
Custom norms	\$950	Choosing from among several options, jurisdiction selects criteria for a set of custom norms. Custom norms will be provided alongside comparative norms in report tables. Graphs will include either custom or comparative norms but not both.
Comparison to prior results	\$1,700	Tables in the final report include comparisons of the jurisdiction's service evaluation ratings to its ratings from as many as three previous years. If you have more than three years of data, this option can be customized for you.
Expanded mailing	\$6,000	Survey is mailed to 3,000 residents instead of 1,200.
Spanish	\$1,600	Survey cover letter includes paragraph in Spanish asking those who wish to complete the survey in Spanish to contact the jurisdiction and request Spanish copy of survey. Jurisdiction will be mailed envelopes – outbound

		and return – and surveys to mail out to those individuals.
Open-ended question	\$1,200	One open-ended question chosen by the jurisdiction is added to the survey. Responses will be categorized and reported in a table under separate cover, accompanied by a complete list of verbatim responses.
Phone data collection	\$6,000	Survey is conducted by phone, rather than by mail, for 400 total completed interviews
Presentation of results	\$1,100	An NRC representative will present results to your jurisdiction's council or other meeting of officials at the end of the survey project. (Actual travel expenses will be added to the cost.)

The NCS™ begins a new class each month. The entire survey from enrollment to final report, takes 18 weeks to complete. For a current schedule, [click here](#).

Reliability of the Survey: Credible, Comparable Results

Since The NCS™ was introduced in 2001, local governments in 21 states have participated. The survey process is being continually refined to ensure that your local government receives the best information possible per dollar spent on your citizen survey. Your results can be compared, at your option, with norms based on the results of more than 350 surveys administered throughout the country.

The NCS™ gives you results with the highest credibility from independent professional survey specialists. You get the satisfaction of personal service, the benefit of comparability with other jurisdictions, and the efficiency of a standardized process.

For More Information

For answers to your frequently asked questions (FAQ) [click here](#)

For more information, a list of participants, and to learn how your community can use The National Citizen Survey™, send an e-mail to ncs@icma.org.

Many other materials on the subject of citizen surveying and The National Citizen Survey™ are available on this site in the downloads section below:

- The National Citizen Survey™ PowerPoint, suitable for presentations to elected officials and other decision makers
- Why Survey? Some Talking Points
- NCS Survey Instrument
- NCS Enrollment Form
- Article: "An Affordable Citizen Survey Now Available for Small Cities" (Betsy Bean) - **The Mayor**, Mar/April 2002
- *Perspectives*, a newsletter about survey research for local government managers and elected officials

How to Enroll

[Click here](#) to print out and complete the enrollment form and fax it or mail it to Nedra James, ICMA, 777 North Capitol St., NE, Ste., 500, Washington, DC 20002-4201.

- [The National Citizen Survey Schedule](#)
- [NCS Frequently Asked Questions](#)

NCS Frequently Asked Questions

[The National Citizen Survey Schedule](#) | **NCS Frequently Asked Questions**

What is The National Citizen Survey™?

The National Citizen Survey™ is a unique service to administer, analyze, and report results from a customizable citizen survey. National Research Center, Inc. and ICMA are able to provide this service at a relatively low cost through careful standardization and automation of the survey process. Each participating jurisdiction can make important customizations for its locale, and the report can compare the results from your jurisdiction with results from other jurisdictions across the United States.

Why should we survey our citizens?

Good reasons include: to measure service performance; to benchmark service quality ratings; to assess community needs; to make long-range, short-term, or strategic plans; to demonstrate the receptivity of your government; to evaluate potential policies or community characteristics; to continue a trendline from periodic surveying; or to respond to a council mandate. These days, residents expect their local government or officials to be as well informed about customer perspectives as the best businesses.

Why should we use The National Citizen Survey™ instead of doing the survey on our own?

The National Citizen Survey™ offers many advantages over both in-house administration and the use of a consultant. These include reduced costs, comparisons to national norms, and the credibility of a widely reputable independent research firm.

What kinds of questions are included on the survey?

Questions are included about the quality of life in your community or county, local policies, demographics, quality of local government services and resident use of services.

Our jurisdiction provides a wide array of services. Will The National Citizen Survey™ let us survey opinions about all of these services?

The selection of service questions is extensive, so all of the major services that you provide are likely to be represented.

Can The National Citizen Survey™ be used by counties?

Yes. A special template, fully customizable, is available for counties.

We participate in ICMA's Center for Performance Measurement. Can we use The National Citizen Survey™ to collect data for CPM?

Yes. In fact, The NCS was designed to coordinate with CPM data collection. If you use the NCS survey instrument, you will not need to ask citizens the same questions again for CPM purposes.

To what extent is the survey customizable?

You may customize your survey by choosing from a set of questions that are commonly used in citizen surveys, that have been endorsed by a panel of experts, and that have been tested at

several pilot sites. You also have the option of creating three policy questions that are entirely specific to your jurisdiction. Furthermore, you may choose among a selection of additional services to modify the administration by including an open-ended question, comparisons to your previous survey results, a larger sample size, phone data collection, a Spanish translation, customized norms, geographic crosstabs, and a breakdown of results by respondent characteristics.

What will the margin of error in the results be?

Typically, with a sample size of 1,200 surveys, there will be about 400 responses, which translates to a margin of error that is approximately 5 percentage points around any percent. One of the additional options is a larger sample size of 3,000 residents, which will reduce the margin of error to about 3 percentage points.

How long will jurisdiction staff spend on The National Citizen Survey™?

This will vary and will depend in part on the way your jurisdiction operates. A lead staff member for the project could expect to spend from 10 to 40 hours over the course of the 18-week administration. Publicity is encouraged, and will take additional staff time. The reward for your rather small investment of time will be a better survey and a higher response rate.

What is the cost of The National Citizen Survey™, and how does it compare to the cost of a survey from a private consultant?

You will find enclosed a list of options for The National Survey™ services, and you will find The NCS™ more affordable than a fully customized survey. The added value of normative data makes The NCS™ even more cost effective.

How long will it take to get results and the report once we sign up?

Once you sign up, you will receive a packet of materials requesting information about customizing the survey. The complete time frame is approximately 12 weeks from the time we receive your completed materials from this packet.

How will the survey be administered?

The survey will be administered by mail. A postcard is sent to randomly selected households announcing that a survey will follow. The first survey comes a week later and is followed by a "reminder" survey one week after that. Data collection by phone is also an option.

How many people in our jurisdiction will receive the mailing?

The basic service includes a sample size of 1,200 residents. However, we also offer the option of a sample size of 3,000 residents at an additional cost.

How many responses can we expect?

With a sample size of 1,200, we typically receive about 400 responses. For a sample size of 3,000, we expect approximately 1,000 responses. The actual number varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The response rate will depend partly on the amount of publicity you provide ahead of time.

What about people who don't speak English?

We offer a Spanish-language version of the survey instrument as a service option. Let us know if you are interested in other languages.

What kind of report will we get?

You will get three separate reports. An executive summary briefs you on results. A comprehensive report includes survey background, survey methods, local results, and appendices. Local results are presented in tables and graphs. A third report, intended for internal use or for public information purposes, at the manager's discretion, compares local results to norms based on National Research Center's database of over 350 surveys conducted throughout the United States.

Can we compare the results of The National Citizen Survey™ to the results of surveys we did in the past?

Yes. As an option, we can convert most service evaluations to The NCS™ measurement scale for comparisons over the last 3 administrations to The NCS™ results.

With which communities will we be able to compare our results?

The normative comparisons are based on about 350 jurisdictions where citizen surveys have been conducted recently. These are communities from all across the United States ranging in size from just a few hundred to over 2 million. More than 200,000 residents of counties, villages, townships, and cities completed these surveys, and they are intended to represent over 30,000,000 Americans. Norms can be customized, too, so that your jurisdiction is compared to others in the database of similar size, location, or type (e.g., counties, cities, towns, etc.).

Do we have to compare our results to national norms?

No, the choice is yours.

What if we don't want our results publicized?

That is up to you. The final report is delivered to the client only, on your time schedule. Comparisons with the normative data are presented in a separate report. Results from our database remain confidential. Norms are created by grouping results so that individual jurisdictions remain anonymous unless they choose to be mentioned for purposes of positive recognition.

With which communities will we be able to compare our results?

The normative comparisons are based on about 300 jurisdictions where citizen surveys have been conducted recently. These are communities from all across the United States ranging in size from just a few hundred to over 2 million. More than 100,000 residents of counties, villages, townships and cities completed these surveys and they are intended to represent over 30,000,000 Americans. Norms can be customized, too, so that your jurisdiction is compared to others in the database of similar size, location or type (e.g., counties, cities, towns, etc.).

How is the validity of the survey authenticated?

In the final report, we provide an elaborate description of our meticulous survey methods. We also provide a certificate of participation, suitable for display, signed by the executive director of ICMA and the president of NRC, to all jurisdictions that successfully complete the survey project.

Can results be used for measuring government performance?

Yes, the opinion of residents is critical in understanding the quality of service delivery and has become a widely-used performance measurement tool. We remind our clients that

administrative records and independent observations about actual service efficiencies and quality measures are important, too.

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777 North Capitol Street, NE
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002

Main phone number: 202-289-4262
Member services: 202-962-3680
Main fax number: 202-962-3500
Order processing center: 1-800-745-8780

[General contact information](#)

[Staff contacts for ICMA members](#)

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Timeline for The National Citizen Survey™ April 2004 Class

Legend: ◀ Indicates when items from NRC are due to you ▶ Indicates when items from you are due to NRC ♦ Indicates information items

Item	Week	Actual Dates
Preparing for the survey		
♦ The NCS survey process is initiated upon receipt of your enrollment form and first payment.....	week 1	Apr 5
◀ NRC mails you The NCS worksheet packet.....	week 2	Apr 12
▶ Due to NRC: Worksheets and additional payment for add-on options.....	week 4	Apr 26
♦ NRC uses the information you provided to generate the sample and customize the survey instrument for your jurisdiction	weeks 5-6	May 3-May 10
◀ NRC provides confirmation documents about options selected by your jurisdiction and a sample of the postcard and mailing envelope for your records.....	week 5	May 3
▶ Due to NRC: Confirmation of options selected.....	week 6	May 10
◀ NRC provides samples of survey materials (cover letters and survey instrument) for your records.....	week 6	May 10
♦ NRC prints materials and prepares mailings.....	weeks 5-6	May 3- May 10
◀ NRC mails evaluation questionnaire and timesheet about the data collection process to you	week 7	May 17
Conducting the survey		
♦ Survey materials are mailed		
♦ Prenotification postcards delivered to post office	week 7	May 17
♦ 1 st wave of surveys delivered to post office	week 8	May 24
♦ 2 nd wave of surveys delivered to post office.....	week 9	May 31
♦ Data collection: surveys received for your jurisdiction	weeks 8-12	May 24 – June 21
♦ <i>Note 1:</i> During this time, you will receive postcards that were undeliverable due to bad addresses, or vacant housing units. This is normal. Please count all the postcards, as we will subtract the number of returned postcards from the total number mailed to estimate the number of "eligible" households in calculating the final response rate.		
♦ <i>Note 2:</i> You may receive phone calls from citizens during this time period who call to inform you they are outside of your jurisdiction's boundaries, or that they do not wish to receive additional mailings, etc. Please reassure them that their household was randomly selected, and while they may receive a total of three mailings from you, they will not receive any additional mailings after that time.		
▶ Due to NRC: evaluation questionnaire and timesheet about the data collection process	week 12	June 21
▶ Due to NRC: Final count of returned postcards.....	week 12	June 21
♦ Survey processing and report writing	week 12-14	June 21-Jul 5
♦ During this time, NRC will process the surveys, perform the data analysis, and produce a two-part draft report for your jurisdiction. The report of results will contain a description of the methodology, information on understanding the results, and graphs and tables of your results. The second report will include a description of NRC's database of normative data from across the U.S. and actual comparisons to your results, where appropriate.		
◀ NRC emails draft report (in PDF format) to you.....	week 15	Jul 12
▶ Due to NRC: jurisdiction feedback on the draft report.....	week 16	Jul 19
◀ NRC mails final report and data file to you (unless otherwise specified)	week 17	Jul 26
◀ NRC mails final invoice to you	week 17	Jul 26
◀ NRC mails final evaluation questionnaire and timesheet to you	week 17	Jul 26
▶ Due to NRC: Final half of costs of The NCS	week 18	Aug 2
▶ Due to NRC: completed final evaluation questionnaire and timesheet	week 18	Aug 2